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NEWS

Hands go to hearts as Winchester celebrates Memorial Day

CHRIS STEVENS | CORRESPONDENT

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VFW Post 3719 Commander Festus McDonough and Post Auxiliary President Marge Labedz place a wreath during Monday's Memorial Day ceremony. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS STEVENS

In her winning essay, McCall Middle School student Sophia Zuni
Memorial Day is important to her "because people fought and los

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lives for us."

It is also important because her father, Dan Zuniga, was one of those who fought, though fortunately he came home to his family.

McCall Middle School sixth grader Sophia Zuniga receives a $500 check from Post 3719 Quartermaster Bill Carroll as Barbara O'Connell and Dan Zuniga look on. Sophia received the check for her winning entry into the annual Voice of Democracy essay contest. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS STEVENS

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“My dad served as a captain in the United States Marine Corps,” Zuniga said, reading her essay before a crowd of over 100 gathered in Edward F. O’Connell Memorial Plaza for the Memorial Day ceremony held May 27. “He was on active duty from 2006 to 2009, training in various parts of the United States before going many times to Iraq, and spending time in Southeast Asia on a Navy ship.”

Zuniga was just one of Winchester’s many veterans who were all remembered Monday during the town’s traditional ceremony, which came together under gray skies and intermittent rain.

“It is awfully good to see so many people here on Memorial Day,” said Barbara O’Connell, who coordinates the event in the plaza named for her husband. “A lot of people have shown up to march in our parade and for the civic exercises.”

Just prior to the ceremony, as dampness turned to drizzle, Town Hall custodian Mike diNanno quickly dried off chairs set out for the town’s dignitaries and veterans, while Mary Sue Stevens paused to snap a photo of plaque honoring Winchester veterans who served.

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Hands went to hearts as the Winchester High School band and the Boston Firemen's Band played the National Anthem. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS STEVENS

“It’s my son,” she said when asked whose name she was after.

Adam Kelligrew White served from 2004-2009, including two years of active duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. Stevens said he came home safely as did most of the current veterans listed on the plaque.

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Words to think on, events to remember

In his welcome, VFW Post 3719 Commander Festus McDonough challenged people to do the right thing, even when it's hard, to be kind and helpful to neighbors — to live a life worthy of those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

"As you go about the rest of your day, remember them and celebrate them," he said. "We have been fortunate that such great heroes existed."

Select Board Chair Michelle Prior reflected on her time in the Peace Corps and "how the privilege of living in peace can obscure the fact that we're not very far removed from the sacrifices made by those in our armed forces."

The morning also included music from the Winchester High School Band, bagpiper retired Fire Chief Rick Tustin along with the reading of the Governor's Proclamation, which gave a brief history of Memorial Day.

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Major Tom Allen, far left, presents Winchester High School senior Bo Spignesi with a four year scholarship to Wake Forest University during Monday's Memorial Day Ceremonies while his family looks on proudly. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS STEVENS

The traditional ceremony did have one twist when Winchester High School senior Robert Bo Spignesi III was honored by Major Tom Allen with a four year ROTC scholarship to Wake Forest University, courtesy of the United States Army.

“We never did this before,” said O’Connell. “It’s a wonderful honor and I’m glad we knew about it.”

Zuniga also reminded people that they should make an effort all to think about those who died fighting for their country.

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“Memorial Day is just one day … I’m so proud of my dad and everyone who has served for this country,” she said.

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Scouts snapped to attention during the playing of the National Anthem at Monday's Memorial
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Dad Dan Zuniga, who stood behind his daughter as she read her essay, said he was just as proud of her.

“She’s amazing,” he said.

VFW Post Quartermaster Bill Carroll, who handed Zuniga a check for $500 for her winning essay, also expressed his admiration.

“I need to let you know there wasn't any question about your essay when it came in before the committee over who was going to win this award this year,” he said.

Carroll also took a minute to honor Linda Pickering, who has run the Voice of Democracy essay contest at the middle school for decades.

“Linda will retire this year,” he said. “And the VFW wanted to present Linda with a citation.”

He said the citation simply offers the Post’s appreciation to Pickering for her invaluable assistance and dedication to the success of the annual essay contest.

“We are forever grateful for your limitless supportive teaching of the true meaning of Memorial Day,” he read.

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Bagpipers at attention during Monday's downtown Memorial Day ceremonies. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS STEVENS

The ceremony ended with the National Anthem played by the Winchester High School Band and the Boston Firemen's Band and an invitation by Post Auxiliary President Marge Labedz to everyone to stop by Post 3719 for refreshments and catching up.

"And please remember to support our troops and their families," she added. "God bless America and thank you all again for being here."

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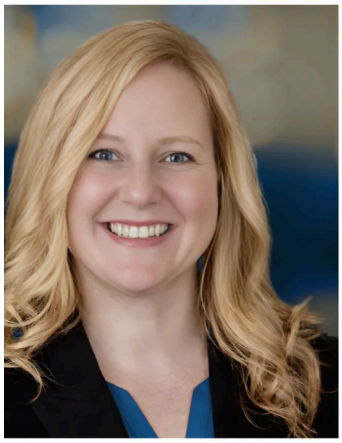

NEWS

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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NEWS

Winchester gun owners face new training rules starting April 2

Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses

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Sen. Jason Lewis, Mass. Senate strengthen fair housing protections for rente

The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis

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as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

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joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

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Celebrate Women's History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

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FEATURES

‘Chicago: Teen Edition’ dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents “Chicago: Teen Edition,” a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS
March 4, 2026

EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents ‘Syldason: You Are Welcome Here’

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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